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SECOND REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION IN SIERRA LEONE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 16 of resolution 1132 (1997) of 8 October 1997 and to the Presidential statement of 14 November 1997.[1] It covers developments in Sierra Leone since my first report, dated 21 October 1997.[2]

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1132 (1997)

Action taken by the military junta, the Economic Community of West African States and the Special Envoy

2. On 23 October 1997, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Committee of Five on Sierra Leone and a delegation representing Major Johnny Paul Koroma, Chairman of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) regime in Sierra Leone, held talks at Conakry and signed a six-month peace plan for Sierra Leone[3] which was to take effect from that date. The United Nations was represented at the signing of the Conakry Agreement by the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. A representative of the Organization of African Unity also attended.

3. The Agreement calls, inter alia, for the cessation of hostilities as from 23 October 1997, to be monitored by an ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) verification mechanism to be assisted, subject to the approval of the Security Council, by United Nations military observers; the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants, which is to take place from 1 to 31 December; the resumption on 14 November of humanitarian assistance to Sierra Leone, to be monitored by ECOMOG and United Nations military observers; commencing 1 December, the return of refugees and displaced persons, with the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the provision of immunities and guarantees for the coup leaders; the restoration of the constitutional government of President Kabbah by 22 April 1998; and the broadening of the government's power base. Under the Agreement, Corporal Foday Sankoh, leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), was expected to

return to Sierra Leone to make his contribution to the peace process. The ECOWAS Committee and the junta's representatives also agreed to continue negotiations towards the effective and prompt implementation of the Agreement.

4. On 5 November, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah issued a statement[4] indicating his acceptance of the Conakry Agreement, and stated his Government's willingness to cooperate with ECOWAS, ECOMOG, the United Nations and UNHCR in the implementation of their respective roles in accordance with the Agreement.

5. Although the junta publicly committed itself to the implementation of the Conakry Agreement and has held discussions with ECOMOG on the modalities for the disarmament process and for the provision of humanitarian assistance, it has issued several statements criticizing key provisions of the Agreement, and raised several important issues (see para. 6 below), which may seriously affect, if not undermine, its implementation.

6. On 11 November, the ECOMOG Force Commander, Major-General Victor Malu, met with representatives of the junta at Kossoh Town, Sierra Leone, to discuss the modalities for the implementation of the Conakry Agreement. The meeting reportedly resulted in a number of provisional agreements, including those on the deployment of ECOMOG troops throughout Sierra Leone and the cessation of all hostile propaganda. However, three major points of disagreement - the role of Nigeria within ECOMOG, the modalities and timing of the return of Corporal Sankoh and whether or not disarmament should extend to the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone (AFSL) - remained.

7. Members of the Council were briefed on the Conakry Agreement on 11 November by representatives of the ECOWAS Committee of Five, including the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria and Ghana, Chief Tom Ikimi and Mr. Victor Gbeho, and the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, Mr. Lansana Kouyaté.

8. On 14 November, the Security Council adopted a Presidential statement expressing its full support and appreciation for the continued efforts of the ECOWAS Committee of Five to seek a peaceful settlement of the crisis, and welcoming the Conakry Agreement.[1] The statement noted with satisfaction President Kabbah's acceptance of the peace plan. On 17 November, members of the Council received the first report of ECOWAS, submitted pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997).[5]

9. In order to assess conditions on the ground and formulate recommendations as to the form that United Nations assistance in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement might take in terms of humanitarian aid, the deployment of military observers and support for ECOWAS and its Monitoring Group, ECOMOG, I requested my Special Envoy for Sierra Leone, Mr. Francis Okelo, to lead a small exploratory team which visited the subregion during the second half of November.

10. The team met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liberia, Mr. Monie Captan, and with senior ECOMOG officers at Monrovia, as well as with President Kabbah and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guinea, Mr. Aliou Camara, at Conakry. The team also met with refugees at Forecariah refugee camp near the border between Guinea and Sierra Leone, and visited the border crossing point at Pamelap.

11. Foreign Minister Captan stated his Government's support for the restoration of constitutional rule in Sierra Leone but expressed concern at the danger of the conflict in Sierra Leone spilling over into Liberia. These concerns were stated previously in a letter dated 31 October 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Liberia addressed to the President of the Security Council.[6]

12. It was intended that the team would accompany the ECOWAS Committee of Five ministerial assessment visit to Freetown, which, under the Conakry Agreement, was scheduled for 20 November. However, following the cancellation of that visit, the ECOMOG Force Commander, General Malu, the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, Mr. Kouyaté, and my Special Envoy, met with junta representatives at Freetown on 27 November to discuss the modalities for the implementation of the Agreement.

13. It should be noted that the route from Kossoh to Freetown, where my Special Envoy and Mr. Kouyaté met with Major Johnny Paul Koroma, the Chairman of the AFRC, was lined with thousands of Sierra Leoneans who were waving banners demanding peace. At the meeting with Major Koroma, my Special Envoy and Mr. Kouyaté stressed the commitment of the international community to the restoration of the constitutional order in Sierra Leone and the need for the junta to cooperate fully in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement. Major Koroma did not express any objections.

14. However, at a meeting held at Jui on the same day between General Malu and the military representatives of the junta, including the AFRC Secretary-General, Colonel Sessay, and its Chief of Staff, Colonel Williams, very little progress was made in discussing the practical modalities for the implementation of military provisions of the Agreement. Colonel Williams insisted that no progress could be made in implementing the decisions reached at the military talks on 11 November until the following issues had been resolved: the release of Corporal Sankoh; the removal of the Nigerian troops from ECOMOG; and the exclusion of the AFSL troops from the disarmament exercise. It was, however, decided that the three committees established at the meeting held on 11 November to deal with disarmament, ceasefire violations and humanitarian assistance, should start operating from 1 December 1997 but, so far, no progress has been made in that regard. A further meeting with the junta to review the situation is expected to be held in the near future, following consultations.

15. It should be noted that while the junta appears to be in control of Freetown, the extent to which it is willing, or able, to negotiate the implementation of the Conakry Agreement is not clear. There have been reports of recent difficulties in the relationship between the AFRC and the RUF. Moreover, on 16 November, Mr. Steven Bio, a close relative of Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, the former National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) Chairman, who had been working closely with the AFRC/RUF junta, was arrested along with the RUF spokesman, Mr. Massaquoi, for allegedly trying to persuade some AFRC and RUF members to oppose the implementation of the Conakry Agreement. In addition, eight members of the AFRC Supreme Council have reportedly been detained for engaging in illegal diamond-mining activities.

16. Although the ceasefire between ECOMOG and the junta's troops in the Freetown area appears to be largely holding, heavy fighting has been reported

between the Kamajors, a traditional hunter militia, and the AFRC/RUF in the south-east and in the diamond-producing areas around Tongo in the east. Clashes between rival factions within the AFRC/RUF have also reportedly taken place, and there are numerous reports that all armed elements in Sierra Leone are recruiting, training and acquiring weapons. Insecurity and armed robberies continue in Freetown, where the warehouses of the non-governmental organization World Vision and that of the United Nations Children's Fund were looted by armed men. The junta has acknowledged the lack of security and has threatened looters with summary execution.

17. ECOMOG is continuing its preparations to implement the military provisions of the Conakry Agreement, including the identification of possible sites for the disarmament and demobilization of all Sierra Leonean armed elements. However, the success of the peace process depends on the creation of conditions that would enable the deployment of ECOMOG throughout the country and to begin the demobilization exercise as soon as possible. In turn, the elaboration of a United Nations concept of operations in Sierra Leone depends on the formulation by ECOMOG of a detailed implementation plan of the Conakry Agreement.

Other action taken pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997)

18. By paragraph 13 of resolution 1132 (1997), the Security Council requested States to report to the Secretary-General within 30 days of the date of adoption of the resolution on the steps they had taken to give effect to the provisions contained in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the resolution. At the time of writing, the following 13 countries have provided information on the measures they have taken in order to give effect to those provisions, namely, Chile, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Japan, Lebanon, Malta, New Zealand, Oman, Monaco, Singapore and Sweden. The Chairman of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997) visited the region from 4 to 7 December to review the status of implementation of the sanctions.

III. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

19. The humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone has deteriorated since the coup of 25 May 1997. The health and nutritional status of the population has been especially affected, owing to a combination of insecurity, a drastic breakdown in public services and limited supplies of essential drugs, vaccines and food. Approximately 157,000 people have been displaced by the conflict associated with the coup. Over 21,000 families are registered as eligible for food aid under various humanitarian projects. There has been a significant increase in the incidence of communicable diseases, especially measles. Furthermore, there are still areas of the country that, for reasons of insecurity, remain inaccessible to the humanitarian community and where the gravity of the emergency situation is unknown.

20. In the rural areas, where armed conflict has not significantly disrupted agriculture, a good rice harvest is expected during December. The distribution of seeds and tools, undertaken by humanitarian organizations between January and June 1997 in two thirds of the country's chiefdoms, contributed significantly to

this encouraging picture. However, in the areas north of Bo, there are reports of some harvests being looted by armed elements.

21. In Freetown, commercial food stocks have dwindled considerably and prices have started to rise as the sanctions take effect. These price increases have affected most the vulnerable groups with limited purchasing power but they are also affecting the majority of the capital's population. It is projected that the remaining commercial food stocks will be severely depleted in approximately two weeks. Furthermore, the supply of food to all towns from rural and coastal areas is now seriously constrained by an increasingly acute shortage of petrol, resulting from the embargo on petroleum and petroleum products.

22. The start of cross-border relief operations, particularly operations involving food aid, has been delayed owing to difficulties in implementing certain aspects of the Conakry Agreement, including the full deployment of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone and, in particular, by the absence of ECOMOG and its inspection teams at the border between Guinea and Sierra Leone, which are required for cross-border deliveries to proceed. At the end of November, there were fewer than 2,000 metric tons of food aid in stock in the country.

23. While the implementation of disarmament and demobilization, as scheduled by the Conakry Agreement, is still under negotiation, the RUF has started releasing to non-governmental child protection organizations some of the children under its control. Once released, these children are given special care until reunification with their families is possible.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

24. The coup of 25 May 1997 was a serious blow to Sierra Leone and also to the subregion. Sierra Leone and its people have suffered greatly from the overthrow of the democratically elected Government of President Tejan Kabbah and continue to suffer harm from its effects on their security and living conditions. It is evident that the international community is determined that the coup must be reversed and the constitutional order restored as soon as possible.

25. The signing of the Conakry Agreement was a significant step towards resolving the crisis in Sierra Leone, and I commend the countries of ECOWAS for their initiative. However, despite some encouraging indications, little concrete progress has been made so far in the implementation of the Agreement which should be pursued with a sense of urgency, with pressure being exerted on the Freetown junta. Meanwhile, the military, political and humanitarian aspects of the Agreement require further clarification and negotiation, as well as the early formulation of the practical modalities for its implementation. These aspects should include the development of a concept of operations for the deployment of ECOMOG throughout the country, the conduct of disarmament, and the timing and modalities of implementation of an effective national reconciliation process. While these efforts must be pursued vigorously, the junta should not be allowed to manipulate the talks and to procrastinate in carrying out its commitments under the Agreement. Disarmament should, of course, be followed by the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, which would require adequate assistance from the international community.

26. The United Nations should be prepared, where appropriate, to take an active part in such negotiations and to help to ensure the proper implementation of the Conakry Agreement. The Abidjan accord[7] which was signed on 30 November 1996 but remained unimplemented in part because of the coup of 25 May 1997, also provides a broader framework which can be utilized, as appropriate, to promote the overall settlement of the crisis.

27. Accordingly, if the steps outlined above are taken, and should security conditions on the ground permit, it would be my intention, with the support of the Security Council, to dispatch promptly a technical survey team to Sierra Leone. Its findings would enable me to present to the Security Council considered recommendations concerning the role that could be played by the United Nations in assisting in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement.

28. In the meantime, I have requested my Special Envoy for Sierra Leone to make arrangements to reopen a small liaison office in Sierra Leone, subject, of course, to acceptable security conditions and the availability of funds. The functions of this office would include liaison with ECOMOG and with the various political forces in Sierra Leone. In accordance with paragraph 4 of resolution 1132 (1997), my Special Envoy would continue to assist the search for a peaceful resolution of the crisis and, to that end, to participate in discussions with all parties concerned. The United Nations will also continue its efforts to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to populations in need.

29. In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to ECOWAS for the close cooperation it has extended to my Special Envoy. The efforts of ECOWAS and its Monitoring Group, ECOMOG, in resolving the crisis in Sierra Leone through the peaceful restoration of the constitutional order deserve the active support of the international community.

Notes

[1] S/PRST/1997/52.

[2] S/1997/811.

[3] S/1997/824, annex II.

[4] See S/1997/886.

[5] See S/1997/895.

[6] S/1997/835.

[7] See S/1996/1034.